

Thailand



Main Objectives

UNHCR's objectives were to ensure that the fundamentals of international protection, particularly the principles of asylum and *non-refoulement* are respected; ensure that refugees at the Thai-Myanmar border are safe from armed incursions, that their protection and assistance needs are adequately met and that the civilian character of refugee camps is maintained; promote a uniform application of admission criteria that should include not only those fleeing fighting but also those fleeing the consequences thereof; identify and protect individual asylum-seekers; promote the development of national refugee legislation and status determination procedures consistent with international standards; ensure fair and equal treatment of all Myanmar asylum-seekers and refugees in Thailand.

Impact

- Almost all asylum-seekers from Myanmar were admitted to Thai soil; a total of 6,258 new arrivals were registered and found shelter in one of the 10 camps located at the Thai-Myanmar border in 2001.
- Joint registration by the Thai Government and UNHCR of camp populations continued to be updated regularly. This joint registration has enabled UNHCR to intervene more effectively on behalf of the refugees. The quality of monitoring of the needs of extremely vulnerable groups improved significantly with a survey carried out in all camps.
- The Government closed the Maneelayo Burmese Student Centre (MBSC) on 27 December as the

majority of refugees there had been resettled in third countries by UNHCR. The residual refugee group was transferred to the Tham Hin camp at the border.

Working Environment

The Context

NGOs have been responsible for more than a decade for providing all types of assistance to Myanmar refugees in the border camps. UNHCR's main role is to address protection issues and identify and tackle any needs not covered by NGOs.

As relations between Thailand and Myanmar improved over the course of the year 2001, Thailand revived bilateral discussion on the repatriation of refugees to Myanmar. The Thai Government did not review its refugee policies, and the admission criteria for all asylum-seekers remained restrictive. The Government advocated early repatriation of refugees to the so-called 'safe areas' in Myanmar and the establishment of a UNHCR presence on the other side of the border. Although in broad agreement, UNHCR held that repatriation must be voluntary and that specific conditions must be met before any organised repatriation can be envisaged.

Constraints

Although UNHCR had unhindered access to all camps, a request to establish a more permanent presence in the camps was turned down by the

Government for fear of creating a pull factor. UNHCR repeatedly requested that one of the camps be relocated further away from the border for security reasons, but this request was also turned down on the grounds that only camps at the border could be sure to retain their temporary character. The Government did not apply its policy of 'harmonisation' (of registration requirements in all camps) to asylum-seekers residing outside camps; this left them vulnerable, without adequate security or assistance.

The Provincial Admission Boards, which ruled on the admission of new arrivals, continued to apply restrictive criteria, and admission was limited to persons fleeing actual fighting. UNHCR frequently endeavoured to influence the decision-making process, both directly and by means of appeals for deserving cases rejected by the Boards.

In late October, a group of 63 persons fleeing Myanmar sought temporary asylum in Thong Phapum district. Despite the efforts of UNHCR, the diplomatic community and NGOs, the group was deported to Htee Wah Doh. UNHCR later received reports that Myanmar troops arrested a group of five persons in Htee Wah Doh, including one of the 63 deportees.

Funding

Although not fully funded, planned activities were implemented without disruption through reallocation of resources mainly due to the scaling down and closure of MBSC which had been the most costly component of the operation.

Persons of Concern				
Main Origin/ Type of Population	Total in Country	Of whom UNHCR assisted	Per cent Female	Per cent under 18
Myanmar (Refugees)	110,300	109,200	48	49

Income and Expenditure (USD) Annual Programme Budget				
Revised Budget	Income from Contributions ¹	Other Funds Available ²	Total Funds Available	Total Expenditure
4,965,473	3,757,391	1,018,122	4,775,513	4,437,441

¹ Includes income from contributions restricted at the country level.

² Includes allocations by UNHCR from unearmarked or broadly earmarked contributions, opening balance and adjustments.

The above figures do not include costs at Headquarters.

Achievements and Impact

Protection and Solutions

As voluntary repatriation is the only viable durable solution for the majority of refugees from Myanmar, UNHCR has started sensitizing the camp population by providing the refugees with opportunities to discuss a variety

of issues related to prospects for voluntary repatriation. The number of spontaneous returns remained very small. UNHCR did not always have access to such cases to ascertain the voluntary nature of their return prior to departure. UNHCR facilitated resettlement of a few individual refugees who were considered protection cases and for whom resettlement was considered the only durable solution.

Urban asylum-seekers, including those in detention, had access to refugee status determination by UNHCR. UNHCR was able to make interventions at an early stage and prevent the arrest and detention of many individual cases despite the fact that under Thai legislation all persons entering Thailand illegally are subject to arrest and detention. There were no reports of deportations from the Immigration Detention Centre of refugees recognised by UNHCR.

Since Thailand is not a signatory to any refugee instruments and lacks any effective legislation on refugees, promotion of refugee law and accession to the Convention remained a priority for UNHCR. During 2001, UNHCR organised some 50 training programmes on refugee protection, targeting government officials, NGOs, academic institutions and local communities. Over one thousand persons participated in such programmes, increasing awareness and willingness amongst some government interlocutors to engage in discussions on developing best practices for refugee protection. The public information strategy has been closely linked to the promotion of refugee law, through coordinated dissemination of information, publications and translated documents to target audiences and interested groups.

Activities and Assistance

Community Services: To improve the quality of assistance, UNHCR mandated an operational partner to undertake an in-depth survey of extremely vulnerable refugees in the camps to assess whether they were receiving adequate protection and assistance. For those in detention, UNHCR provided psychological support and material assistance. Due to the presence of landmines in the border areas, UNHCR continued to organise mine awareness campaigns in the camps.

Crop Production: UNHCR organised small gardening activities for refugee women in MBSC to supplement their daily rations.

Domestic Needs/Household Support: All MBSC refugees received monthly allowances until the closure of the Centre. Since refugees in Bangkok had no source of income, UNHCR provided cash assistance to 576 persons, pending their admission to the camps. After a thorough needs assessment, all vulnerable urban refugees living in Bangkok received a cash subsistence allowance. In Bangkok, a team of social counsellors provided counselling to traumatised refugee children and others suffering the chronic insecurity of prolonged detention.

Education: More than 80 per cent of the refugee children from Myanmar were enrolled in formal or non-formal education organised by NGOs. UNHCR provided school supplies to 46,000 students in 132 schools in the border camps. Environmental education was incorporated in the school curriculum. UNHCR also opened camp libraries in Mae Khong Kha and Mae Ra Ma Luang; more than 78,000 refugees thus had access to educational material and literature in 2001. Primary education and vocational training were also provided to refugees in MBSC. For urban refugee children, UNHCR succeeded in making arrangements with local Thai schools for the attendance of 51 refugee children of various nationalities.

Food: UNHCR provided fresh food rations for all refugees in MBSC through an NGO. In the border camps, UNHCR organised supplementary feeding programmes targeting some 150 of the most vulnerable refugees, mainly women and children. UNHCR also provided for the needs of the remaining 34 Laotian refugees in Ban Napho camp.

Forestry: Activities to stabilise erosion and land degradation in Umpium continued in 2001. UNHCR organised a series of environmental training programmes in the camps and surrounding villages. In the camps, environmental activities included tree nurseries and organic farming.

Health/Nutrition: NGOs provided out-patient services for refugees in camps, and the overall health status of the refugee population remained satisfactory. All refugees in MBSC, as well as those

living outside camps, enjoyed access to basic health services as well as referral to local hospitals when necessary.

Legal Assistance: The Government and UNHCR jointly updated registration in all border camps. UNHCR organised a workshop to ensure harmonisation of registration procedures in all camps and to improve the quality of registration documentation provided to refugees. UNHCR provided legal assistance for Myanmar refugees facing trial, especially in Mae Hong Son and Tham Hin. Interpreters were hired to facilitate refugee status determination of the Myanmar asylum-seekers in Bangkok. In 2001, UNHCR continued to conduct refugee status determination and a total of 650 persons were recognised under the UNHCR mandate (either on first application or on appeal).

Operational Support (to Agencies): UNHCR funded part of the operational costs of NGOs as well as those of local authorities involved in the assistance programme.

Sanitation: UNHCR expanded sanitation programmes to improve the waste disposal/recycling system in all camps. Vector control was organised on a regular basis through the use of insecticides and traps. No epidemics occurred in the camps.

Thailand: UNHCR ensures that protection and material assistance were provided to refugees and asylum-seekers. Refugee children in Surin province.
UNHCR / K. Singhaseni



Shelter/Other Infrastructure: Since UNHCR is not allowed by the authorities to build “offices” in the border camps, UNHCR maintained “working stations” in each camp to facilitate daily activities. A multi-purpose meeting room in Mae La camp was also built. UNHCR upgraded a road in Mae Hong Son to maintain access to the camp during the rainy season.

Transport/Logistics: UNHCR provided transport to transfer refugees to the border camps or between camps for family reunification purposes.

Water: UNHCR maintained the water system in MBSC to provide 20 litres of potable water per person per day to refugees as well as local villagers.

Organisation and Implementation

Management

The Regional Office in Bangkok provided support to the UNHCR Office in Cambodia and Viet Nam. The Office also continued to support the three field offices located along the Thai-Myanmar border. After the closure of the UNHCR office in Vientiane at the end of 2001, the Regional Office took over responsibility for Laos. At the end of the year a total of 53 staff were assigned to the operation in Thailand: 10 international staff (including two JPOs) and 43 national staff working in Mae Sot, Mae Hong Son, Kanchanaburi and Bangkok.

Working with Others

UNHCR worked with six implementing partners, two national NGOs and four international NGOs. As in previous years, seven international NGOs, with their own funding, covered the basic material assistance needs of the Myanmar refugees at the border. UNHCR’s assistance programme mainly supported protection activities. UNHCR

participated in the monthly meeting organised by the Committee for Co-ordination of Services for Displaced Persons in Thailand (CCSDPT) which is a forum for all NGOs: it exists to co-ordinate their efforts and represent their interests to the Government, international organisations and the diplomatic community. UNHCR continued to hold regular information-sharing meetings in Bangkok and the field with NGOs, relevant authorities and embassies. To improve its planning for 2002, UNHCR organised a Strategic Planning Workshop in Bangkok in February 2001, inviting all stakeholders, including NGO representatives, government officials and donors.

UNHCR continued to share office premises at the UN house in Bangkok, thus maintaining regular contacts with sister agencies and participating actively in various inter-agency planning and discussion groups.

Overall Assessment

The purpose and scope of UNHCR's activities on the Thai/Myanmar border are outlined in the semi-official 'Working Arrangements' document drawn up with the Government, but its provisions are sometimes vague and subject to wide interpretation. Through discussions with relevant ministries and other governmental bodies and through practical arrangements in the field, UNHCR did its utmost to ensure that the implementation of the 'Working Arrangements' provisions was compatible with UNHCR's mandate. As a result, the vast majority of persons who sought admission to Thailand are still on Thai soil and relatively few people denied admission were deported.

At the border, security was maintained within and around the camps. In accordance with its mandate, UNHCR has regularly informed the Government of its readiness to help bring about a solution to a problem that has lasted for some 16 years. Pending such an eventuality, UNHCR continued to request the Government's understanding on admission criteria, UNHCR's presence in the camps and the maintenance of the civilian nature of the camps.

Offices

Bangkok

Kanchanaburi
Mae Hong Son
Mae Sot

Partners

Government Agencies

Ministry of Defence
Ministry of Interior
Operation Centre for Displaced Persons

NGOs

Catholic Office for Emergency Relief for Refugees
Foundation in Support of Refugee Assistance Programmes
Handicap International
International Rescue Committee
Shanti Volunteer Association
ZOA Refugee Care (Netherlands)

Financial Report (USD)				
Expenditure Breakdown	Annual Programme Budget		Annual Programme Budget	
	Current Year's Projects	notes	Prior Years' Projects	notes
Protection, Monitoring and Co-ordination	1,411,579		11,412	
Community Services	165,610		(395)	
Crop Production	937		2,620	
Domestic Needs / Household Support	376,592		22,191	
Education	245,117		39,284	
Food	61,173		30,125	
Forestry	36,401		16,018	
Health / Nutrition	129,849		27,522	
Legal Assistance	281,761		113,775	
Operational Support (to Agencies)	180,977		34,654	
Sanitation	69,628		16,731	
Shelter / Other Infrastructure	60,696		94,091	
Transport / Logistics	21,242		1,068	
Water	893		1,129	
Transit Accounts	0		(3,862)	
Instalments with Implementing Partners	218,578		(340,914)	
Sub-total Operational	3,261,033		65,449	
Programme Support	1,022,570		180	
Sub-total Disbursements / Deliveries	4,283,603	(3)	65,629	(5)
Unliquidated Obligations	153,838	(3)	0	
TOTAL	4,437,441	(1) (3)	65,629	

Instalments with Implementing Partners

Payments Made	1,136,242		5,643	
Reporting Received	917,664		346,557	
Balance	218,578		(340,914)	
Outstanding 1st January	0		518,552	
Refunded to UNHCR	0		113,403	
Currency Adjustment	0		(11,077)	
Outstanding 31 December	218,578		53,158	

Unliquidated Obligations

Outstanding 1st January	0		221,044	(5)
New Obligations	4,437,441	(1)	0	
Disbursements	4,283,603	(3)	65,629	(5)
Cancellations	0		155,415	(5)
Outstanding 31 December	153,838	(3)	0	

Figures which cross reference to Accounts:

- (1) Annex to Statement 1
- (3) Schedule 3
- (5) Schedule 5